The Concept of Baptism in Christianity

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Abstract: Baptism is one of the sacrament in Christian Church including Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Church. And it is symbol of acceptance of Jesus Christ as the savior and Lord in openly or publicly. The purpose of this paper is to explain the concept of baptism in the New Testament. Baptism is a sign of conversion – that is, of the turning of a person’s life toward Jesus Christ. The baptism of adults throughout Christian history has been preceded by a long period of introduction to the faith. Moreover Baptism is sign of repentance like a put off the old nature or sinful nature and put on the new nature in Christ.

1. The Origin and Meaning of term ‘baptism’

The word Baptism is originally derived from Greek word according to Maurice says, “A word formed from a Greek root meaning “to dip” and used as a special designation of one the rites of the Christian Church. The practice seems to have been suggested by the Jews, who removed ceremonial uncleanness by bathing body in water and required Gentiles to be baptized on becoming Jewish proselytes. But the rite, it is claimed, assumed a new significance. Whereas Jewish baptism was thought of only as a means of getting rid of ceremonial uncleanness, Christian baptism was regarded as “a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” Jesus allowed himself to be baptized by John the Baptist. He did not himself baptize, however, and it has been questioned whether he himself instituted the rite. True. He is represented having done so."[1] “Therefore go and make disciple of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”[2](Matthew 28:19).

Moreover the baptism is symbol of repentance of sins. Also it is symbol of accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior and Lord in publically. Christians believe that by being united with Christ through baptism, they are also united with all other Christians. Through baptism a community is created that goes beyond all natural boundaries of nations, cultures, races, social classes, and sex. “for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ”[3](Gal.3:27-28)

“In Christianity, baptism —either by plunging in water or by sprinklings with it—represents the first act of incorporation “into Christ” and into the fellowship of the Church. Further acts of incorporation are —confirmation (-Initiation Rites2) and the Eucharist. Other religious societies have similar rites (Initiation Rites1). Jewish —Proselyte baptism incorporates the baptized not only into the religious fellowship but also into God’s-covenant people. This matter is relevant in the dialogue between Israel and church.”[4]

“The Biblical texts give evidence of the first baptismal practice and reflect and special character of baptism and of its significance for the life of believers and the church. But the further history of baptism and theological reflection on it shows that in spite of its uniqueness, and perhaps because of it, differences in understanding and practice arose. Different interpretation have been important (-Anabaptist; Baptists; Pentecostal Churches ;) and still priest (see 3and4). They are a problem in the economical movement”[5]

“As is true in the history of — mission, baptism is again functioning as a test of Christian identity, both for churches in countries affected by — secularization and for those of the — Third world theology discussed on the practice of baptismal in the United States and the change in practice in Germany brings to light to the problems and takes that obtain and the concern to meet the challenge that baptism poses.”[6]

2. Biblical background

This paper briefly discussed on the basis of Biblical background of the concept of baptism. “The basis of all New Testament about the baptism and the related practice is the historical fact of the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist “At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.”[7](Mark 1:9). Even if Jesus himself did not baptism “Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciple.”[8] (John 4:1-2). Jesus the command “Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing
them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”[9] (Matt. 28:18-20), belongs to a later time and if the NT text give evidence of very broad background in tradition and the history of religion, still it is the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan the explains why, from the first, baptism was a normative rite of – initiation in the – primitive Christian community. Ritual washings (-Cultic Purity) at - Qumran, - proselyte baptism, and the washings in some mystery cult (-Mystery Religions) show some similarities, but they cannot be accepted as the historical presupposition and source of primitive Christian baptism.”[10]

3. The Concept of baptism in Primitive Practice

Further this paper gives briefly account of the concept of baptism in Primitive Practice. “Community with John baptism may be seen in some typical features of primitive Christian baptismal practice. Early Christian baptism is not self-baptism but is administered by a baptizer”[11]

“I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius... (Yes, I also baptized the house of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else)”[12] (1 Cor. 1:14, 16).

“And he gave orders to stop the chariot then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him”[13] (Acts 8:38 ).

“So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for few days.”[14] (Acts10:48).

Like John’s baptism it is a once for-all act, unlike the ritual washings in ancient Judaism and pagan – Hellenism. As a rule, it involved immersion in running water (Acts 8:38). It is also, like John’s baptism, a baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4; Acts 2:38; 1 Cor 6:11; Rom. 3:25) and thus had an – eschatological and – soteriological dimension.

“In two ways, however, it differs from John’s baptism. It views the Christ-event as the eschatological event of salvation that is present in baptism “in the name of Jesus” 1Cor. 12:13; Mark 1:8; A11:16’cts 1:5; -Holy Spirit.”[15]

4. The concept of baptism in Synoptic Gospels

This paper also explains about baptism in the first four Gospels, they are called as Synoptic Gospels. “In the – Synoptic the baptism of Jesus is the paradigm of Christian existence (Mark 1:9-11) for already at his baptism the Son of God was beginning to follow path of – obedience to the will of God. Current practice by the end of the first century reflects the command to baptize in Matt. 28: 18-20. Baptism here is a normative initiation rite linked necessarily to salvation. As a sacrament of deliverance signifying liberation from past sins and worldly powers and the making possible of a new Christian life, it plays the same role in Eph. 4:5; 5:26; 1Pet. 1:3,23; 3:21; Heb. 6:2 Titus 3:5.”[16]

5. The concept of Baptism Acts of Apostle

This paper indeed explains the origin and importance of the baptism in the Acts of Apostles. “The Acts of Apostles bears witness to the central place of baptism in the history of early Christian mission. Programmatically, - Peter’s Pentecost sermon ends in 2:38 with the call for baptism to which Paul’s practice later corresponds (16:14-15, 33; 18:8). Luke closely associates the – laying on the hands, the conferring of the Spirit, and baptism, with laying on of hands either preceding baptism (9:17-19) A decisive point is the linking of the apostolic laying on of hands to the gift of the Spirit.”[17]

6. The concept of Baptism in Pauline letters

This paper is discussing the concept of baptism in Pauline letters. “The significance of baptism for Paul may be seen in his adoption of existing tradition 1 Cor. 1:30; 6:11; 12:13; Gal. 3:26-28; Rom. 3:25; 4:25; 6:3-4). Rom. 6:3-4 is particularly important for it brings baptism into analogy with ideas in the Hellenistic mystery religions (Apuleius Met. 11.23.8; Firmicus Maternus Err. prof. rel. 22) by describing baptism as a sacramental experiencing of the death of Jesus, with the consequence of a death to sin and an ensuing life in – righteousness.”[18]

“Baptism is central in three ways for Paul’s ecclesiology – (Church 2.1). First, it is the sacrament of the unity of the – congregation (1 Cor. 10:10-17; 12:13; Rom. 12:5). Second, the gift of Spirit and the beginning of the new Christian life are associated with baptism (1 Cor. 6:11; 12:13, 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Gal. 5:24-25; Rom. 5:5) Third, in baptism believers attain the exalted state of Christ. Paul firmly links his “in Christ” to baptism (Gal. 3:26-28; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:17a; Rom. 6:11).”[19]

“Paul’s views one’s existence in the church as deriving from baptism; he is aware of being committed and empowered by God’s action in it to do God’s will in the church and in the world. In his ethics baptism is the place of forgiveness of sins, endowment with the Spirit, and the beginning of the new life in Christ. As such, it is of great importance. Baptism also figures largely in his soteriology, for it involves for individual that Christians the real, historical fulfillment of the liberation from the flesh, sin, and death has been set forth in Christ.”[20]
7. The concept of baptism in John Epistles

Also in the Johnnie writing, baptism is a normative initiation rite (John 3:22, 26; 4:1). On this view it follows Jesus’ own practice, so that what is said about its nature in John 3:5 or 1 John 2:20, 27 is only to be expected. As elsewhere in the NT, baptism and the gift of the Spirit are primary data of Christian existence (along with John 3:5-6; 6:6a 1 John 2:27; 3:24; 4:13; 5:6-8). The non sacramental interpretation of John by R. Bultmann (1884-1976) is exegetically debatable. The original setting of many of these texts might well have been liturgical (-Worship1.3), although we cannot reconstruct primitive baptismal –liturgies.

8. The concept of Baptism in Protestant Churches

This research paper explains about the views on the baptism in the Protestant Churches. “The first rite of passage experienced by most protestant is baptism. For some Protestants, baptism occurred within few days of after birth; for others it is reserved for the period of maturity when a person can make an explicit declaration of faith. Christian baptism marks the entry of an individual into Christian society and association with Christian faith. The water that is used during the ceremony symbolized both cleansing from sin and the living flowing water of new life in Christ. Baptism is thus foundation of Christian life, its initiation into the soul of the baptized.

Various passages in the Bible referring to baptism have a led to differences in practice and believe among the various Protestant denominations. Regardless of how baptism is carried out however, the uniting factor is the use of water as a sign and agent of spiritual cleaning. Most Protestant churches practice baptism in the name of Trinity, in accordance with Jesus’ instructions to his disciple: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of Holy Spirit.”(Matt. 28:19) Some groups may baptize by pouring water over the head of the one to be baptized or by sprinkling him or her with water or by minister’s dipping his or figures in water and placing on the candidate’s head.”[21]

Although some Protestant denominations, such as the Quakers (members of the Society of Friends) and Christian Societies do practice baptism, it is usely viewed by Christians as being necessary for salvation: ( Mark 16:16; John 3:5)

9. Significance of Baptism

Now we discuss the significance of baptism, Brown says “Baptism in the NT is in many ways the starting point and basis of central ecclesiologi
cal, ethical, pneumatological, anthropological, and stereological statements. The fact that NT theology is not uniform does not reduce the fundamental significance of baptism relative to God’s historical action and the beginning of the Christian life. Baptism is primarily God’s act, for God promises his presence in it. Prior conditions do not have to be met by candidates, and to that extent one may see in the baptism of infants an appropriate practice that is not in conflict at heart with Paul doctrine of baptism- and justification. The grace of God put into effect by Christ breaks through in baptism and may be received in grateful faith.”[22]

“Traditionally, Baptism is, along with Eucharist, one of the two most fundamental sacraments in Christian practice. Both Catholic and classic Reformation teaching (except for Zwangli) On the Catholic view preserved in Anglican tradition and usage, it is visible sign and seal of the regeneration of the soul, conferring grace on those who receive it, putting no obstacle in the way. The pouring water on the candidate and the use of the Trinitarian formula are considered necessary for the validity of the sacrament. Traditionally Baptism is normally administered to infants, on whose behalf of sponsors take the vows to renounce Satan and all his work.

The practice of infant baptism, although not specifically authorized in the New Testament, was general from early Christians times and is implied in certain New Testament passages, e.g., Matthew 19:14, Acts 16:33;”[23]

Conclusion

This paper explained the concept of Baptism in Christianity particularly in the Protestant Churches. It explained what does it mean? Originally came from? This paper explained that the baptism is one of the sacraments which are using the Christian church. It emphasizes open or publically acceptance of Christian faith. Also it is a symbolically important that, repentance of sins. further it gives the meaning of newness of life that buried the sinful nature with and risen with new nature.

References

[16] I bid. p. 184.